

BOARD OF TRADE OFFICIALS

Copy of an article which appeared in the Stamp Collectors' Annual of 1907. - by I.J. Bernstein.

In the year 1880 the inconvenience of having to pay for the postage of official letters out of their own private pockets, and having to wait till the end of the quarter before the Government reimbursed them for the outlay, was the cause of much complaint amongst officials. It was felt to be an injustice, and various other schemes were devised to supply them with stamps that, though retaining their franking power, could not be converted into cash, and that were so marked as to be only available for use on official correspondence.

Special stamps were suggested; it was thought of using the unappropriated die for the purpose, putting the name of the department in the label at the foot. It was, however, considered inadvisable from a Post Office point of view to have different stamp than those from the current, and the devices employed by private firms and the Oxford Union Society, against misuse, were then resorted to. Printing on the back did not meet the requirements and there remained but over-printing on the face or perforating initials or designs through the stamp. This latter method was just coming to the front, and much encouraged by the Post Office. Consequently it was tried by the Government Department of the Board of Trade, and the first issue was made on the 27th, January, 1882. As, however, the perforated device was not easy to distinguish from those used by private firms, particularly when on a letter, this method was not adapted by the other departments, excepting the Office of Works, which used it for a short period - August, 1895 to March, 1896. The Board of Trade, however, retained it till all distinctive official stamps were finally abolished on 14th, May, 1904.

Their appearance passed quite unnoticed in philatelic circles, and for many years it was little thought that the perforation of a Crown, with the initials B.T. underneath, was of an official character on a par with the overprint I.R. official which created much of a stir when it appeared in September, 1882.

A warrant for their preparation, such as was required for the overprinted officials, not being necessary, no official record is available of what stamps, or how many of any stamp, were so perforated.

The official information available states only: "That they were first used on January, 27th, 1882, and that all stamps from the 2d to 1/- values current between that date and May, 14th, 1904 (when their use, in common with other official stamps, was discontinued), were issued to, as required, and used by the department."

As, however, the 2d. blue (line engraved), plate 15, was one of the first Board of Trade Officials, it is evident that the stamps were prepared some months before issue, as this stamp was superseded by the 2d. Carmine Rose (De La Rue Series) in November, 1880. I propose, therefore, listing the stamps that may possibly be found Board of Trade official, marking those with an asterisk that I have actually seen.

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It is evident that two, if not more, perforating machines were employed during the 23 years these stamps were in use, as the holes in the earlier issues are considerably larger than in the later ones, which are also found without the full stop between the initials. They were, no doubt, intentionally made smaller, as the larger the hole the more tender and likely to tear was the stamp. It is probable that the machine consisted of only ~~five~~ device, each stamp in a row being punched separately, but the rows were folded up either vertically or horizontally, and several thicknesses of stamps perforated simultaneously, as one can find vertical pairs with the device, tet-beche, or horizontal pairs with one of the designs reversed. In the case the crown being symmetrical it does not show any differences, but the letter read T.B.

Being hand punched, and a number of stamps punctured by one operation, the quantity of minor varieties resulting is rather big.

Besides the principal ones, the tete-beche and reversed varieties already mentioned, one can find stamps with either the B or the T, or with both entirely, or in part, not punctured, the T reading like and inverted L, or with a short upright or horizontal stroke. Examples are found with the part of the Crown missing, and I have seen some with the crown only.

Other flaws in the design are due to the breaking of single pins, and are quite too numerous to mention.

In common with other Government Departments, the Board of Trade correspondence to and from head quarters was franked, and the use of stamps unnecessary.

Stamps were only used by the Head Office for letters going abroad, and by branch offices for all correspondence other than that addressed to head quarters. As the Board of Trade has no foreign branches, it follows that ~~most~~ most of their stamps went to foreign countries (mostly to Captains of British boats at foreign ports), and their rarity is thus explained. Added to this is the fact that hardly anybody was ~~was~~ aware of their official character, and they, were no doubt, destroyed as damaged (i.e perforated) stamps.

A few may be found with cancellation of a seaport, but most of them have the London postmark.

Since 1887, to meet requirements of the Parcel Post Act, an occasional copy is to be found that has been used on a parcel.

Why these stamps are not catalogued I cannot understand. English specialists' catalogues find room for 'Firms names on back' 'College issues' 'Private telegraph companies' and latterly Railway letter stamps; even our Standard Catalogue includes Private and Army Telegraphs; mostly issued only by permission of

